

Message Text

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INFO AMCONSUL MELBOURNE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L 1681

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: AS PINT

SUBJECT: THE ALP'S IRAQI CONNECTION

REF: (A) CANBERRA 1553, (B) CANBERRA 1477

1. SUMMARY: DESPITE THE GLOOMY PREDICTION HE MADE REPORTED IN REFTEL (A), GOUGH WHITLAM'S CHANCES OF SURVIVING AS ALP PARLIAMENTARY LEADER HAVE IMPROVED SOMEWHAT IN THE LAST 48 HOURS. END SUMMARY

2. THREE THINGS ACCOUNT FOR THE CHANGE. FIRST THE GOVERNMENT HAS BEGUN A POLICE INVESTIGATION INTO THE WHOLE IRAQI AFFAIR. THIS GIVES THE AFFAIR PARTISAN OVERTONES. THE ALP TENDS TO COME TOGETHER WHEN UNDER ATTACK. SECONDLY, THE DEEP INVOLVEMENT OF RUPERT MURDOCH IN SURFACING THE STORY HAS INFURIATED ALP MEMBERS WHO DESPISE HIM TO A MAN. MOST IMPORTANTLY THE ALP POLITICIANS HAVE LOOKED AT THE PROSPECTS OF AN ALP WITHOUT WHITLAM AS LEADER AND FOR VARIOUS PERSONAL AND POLITICAL REASONS THEY DON'T LIKE WHAT THEY SEE.

3. WHITLAM IS RECEIVING STRONG SUPPORT FROM THE FEDERAL PARTY'S VICE PRESIDENT JACK EGERTON, AS WELL AS FROM NSW
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SENATOR JAMES MCCLELLAND WHO REPRESENTS THE DOMINANT

RIGHTWING BRANCH OF THE ALP IN NSW. THEIR SUPPORT OF WHITLAM APPEARS TO BE BASED UPON TWO CONSIDERATIONS. THEY HAVE DOUBTS ABOUT THE ABILITY OF FORMER TREASURER BILL HAYDEN TO FUNCTION AS AN EFFECTIVE PARTY LEADER, AND THEY DO NOT WANT TO SEE HAYDEN BECOME LEADER AS A RESULT OF OBTAINING THE SUPPORT OF LEFTWING FIGURES LIKE DEPUTY ALP PARLIAMENTARY LEADER, TOM UREN, AND SENATOR THOMAS GIETZELT.

4. HAYDEN HIMSELF IS A MODERATE INDIVIDUAL WHO HAS GENUINE AND WE BELIEVE WELL-FOUNDED DOUBTS ABOUT HIS OWN LEADERSHIP ABILITY AND HE WOULD BE RELUCTANT TO ASSUME THE LEADERSHIP AS THE CANDIDATE OF THE ALP'S LEFTWING.

5. THE LEFTWING OF THE ALP'S VICTORIAN BRANCH, LED BY FEDERAL EXECUTIVE WILLIAM HARTLEY, A RADICAL WHO IS VIOLENTLY PRO-ARAB, MUST STICK WITH WHITLAM OR BE COMPLETELY DISCREDITED.

6. THE POSITION OF ALP FEDERAL PRESIDENT BOB HAWKE IS LESS CLEAR. HAWKE WANTS TO BECOME THE PARLIAMENTARY LEADER OF THE ALP WITHIN THE NEXT FEW YEARS. IF THE ALP'S PARLIAMENTARY CAUCUS PICKS HAYDEN TO SUCCEED WHITLAM, HAWKE'S CHANCES OF MOVING INTO PARLIAMENT AND ASSUMING THE LEADERSHIP QUICKLY ARE DIMINISHED. IT CLEARLY IS IN HAWKE'S INTEREST TO SEE SOMEONE RATHER THAN HAYDEN REPLACE WHITLAM AS LEADER AT THIS TIME OR TO ALLOW A BADLY BRUISED WHITLAM TO RETAIN HIS POSITION UNTIL HAWKE IS READY TO MAKE HIS MOVE.

7. ALP PARTY MEN IN VICTORIA AND NSW WILL PLAY A CRUCIAL ROLE IN THE OUTCOME OF THE STRUGGLE. STATE ELECTIONS ARE APPROACHING IN BOTH STATES AND ARTY LEADERS MUST DECIDE WHETHER THEIR OWN ELECTORAL PROSPECTS ARE BETTER WITH OR WITHOUT WHITLAM LEADING THE ALP IN FEDERAL PARLIAMENT.

8. ANOTHER CONFUSING FACTOR IS THAT SOME MEMBERS OF THE ALP'S PARLIAMENTARY LEFTWING ARE STRONGLY COMMITTED
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SUPPORTERS OF ISRAEL. THEY WILL NOT BE INCLINED TO GO ALONG WITH THEIR FAACTION OF THE PARTY ON THIS ISSUE IF THE ALLEGATIONS ABOUT THE IRAQI AFFAIR ARE SUBSTANTIALLY CORRECT.

9. COMMENT. THE ODDS AGAINST WHITLAM BEING SACKED AS OPPOSITION LEADER MUST BE LOWERED SOMEWHAT BUT STIL REMAIN FAIRLY HIGH. END COMMENT. HARGROVE

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